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FOR ATHERTON FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MOPS LE SY

SUBJ: DIALOGUE WITH SYRIANS RE FUTURE OF WEST BEIRUT

REF: STATE 169969 (BEIRUT 6029) STATE 171475

1. OUR "DIALOGUE" WITH SYRIA:

AS YOU KNOW I HAVE SOUGHT PURSUE WITH SYRIANS SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT MONTHS HOW THEY SEE LEBANESE CRISIS DEVELOPING. THEIR ANSWERS AT BEST HAVE BEEN BLAND. DURING MY SESSION WITH DAOUDI JUNE 25, HE SAID ASAD HAD MADE NO COMMENT ABOUT MY PRESENTATION OF MY TALKING POINTS ON LEBANON DEVELOPED AT OUR PARIS MEETING AND I HAVE SINCE HAD NO FURTHER INDICATION OF THE PRESIDENT'S THINKING.

2. WHEN SHIHABI IS ACCESSIBLE, WHICH HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY RARE, HE HAS PROVIDED AN INCISIVE OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF PLAY IN LEBANON AT THAT PARTICULAR MOMENT. BUT HE CLEARLY SEES IT AS BEYOND HIS ROLE TO SHARE WHATEVER INSIGHTS ASAD PROVIDES HIM ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF PRESIDENTIAL PLANNING. DAOUDI, WHO WORKS IN AN OFFICE NEARBY TO ASAD AT THE PRESIDENCY, IS A CAUTIOUS DIPLOMAT WHO IN MY EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN ON ISSUE OF LEBANON MORE A GLORIFIED NOTE TAKER THAN A SENIOR COUNSELOR WHO BELIEVES IT WITHIN HIS COMPETENCE TO IMPART INSIGHTS ABOUT ASAD'S THINKING. HE

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IS NOT A BAATH PARTY MEMBER. KHADDAM AND DAOUDI ARE BOTH

ACCURATE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR US TO USE IN TRANSMITTING OUR THOUGHTS TO ASAD. (KHADDAM OCCASIONALLY MAY BLURT OUT COMMENTS ABOUT SYRIA'S INTENTIONS BUT THESE MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUSTWORTHY INSIGHTS INTO THE REAL DYNAMICS OF SYRIAN POLICYMAKING.) IT HAS BEEN, HOWEVER, LARGELY A ONE-WAY STREET AND EFFECTIVELY WE HAVE NO "DIALOGUE" AS SUCH WITH THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP ON LEBANON. FOR OUR PART WE HAVE BEEN HIGHLY SELECTIVE IN WHAT WE HAVE SHARED WITH THE SYRIANS ABOUT LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS.

3. ASAD BRIEFED HUSSEIN THROUGH KHADDAM ON JUNE 29 ABOUT THE OVERALL SYRIAN SCENARIO FOR LEBANON (AMMAN 3476). I ASSUME THAT WE WILL BE HEARING FROM THE KING, IN THE WAKE OF HIS JULY 10 VISIT TO DAMASCUS, ABOUT HOW THE PRESIDENT'S THINKING HAS EVOLVED OVER THE PAST 12 DAYS. I WOULD, OF COURSE, PREFER TO HEAR THIS DIRECTLY FROM ASAD --AND BELIEVE WE MUST BE ALERT TO JORDANIANS PUTTING THEIR OWN GLOSS ON THESE REPORTS-- BUT THE PRESIDENT HAS FOR THE PAST THREE MONTHS FOUND IT INCONVENIENT TO RECEIVE ME. ON THE BASIS OF THE LATE JUNE SCENARIO AS RELAYED TO US BY HUSSEIN, I AM FORCED TO CONCLUDE THAT SYRIA'S POLITICAL DECISIONS REGARDING WEST BEIRUT WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE AFFECTED BY POSSIBLE RISKS TO OUR EMBASSY, AUB, AUH OR THOSE AMERICAN CITIZENS STILL RESIDENT THERE. I CONSIDER IT UNTHINKABLE THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD ALERT US IN ADVANCE TO ANY MAJOR MILITARY ACTIONS THEY MAY HAVE IN MIND AFFECTING WEST BEIRUT OR ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON. WE SIMPLY DO NOT ENJOY THEIR CONFIDENCE TO THAT DEGREE.

4. AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT SYRIAN'S SCENARIO INVOLVES A SYRIAN MILITARY ATTACK ON WEST BEIRUT. SHOULD MATTERS DETERIORATE INTO WIDE-SCALE STREET FIGHTING IN THAT PART OF THE CAPITAL, THERE IS EVERY REASON TO ASSUME IT WILL BE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES AND NOT RPT NOT SYRIANS WHO WILL BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED.

5. SYRIAN GOALS: A PRINCIPAL SYRIAN POLICY GOAL IN LEBANON IS TO CREATE A PLO MORE RESPONSIVE TO SYRIAN DIRECTION THAN THAT ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN OVER THE PAST YEAR. THE SYRIANS WOULD PREFER TO CUT THE PLO DOWN TO SIZE BY MEANS OTHER
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THAN A FRONTAL MILITARY ASSAULT. ASSUMING THE CORRECTNESS OF REPORTS THAT SYRIA AGAIN SHELLLED THE SIDON REFINERY IN THE PAST TWO DAYS, THIS IS ANOTHER ASPECT OF A DAMASCENE POLICY TO SQUEEZE THE PLO AND THEIR LEBANESE ALLIES BY DENYING THEM FUEL, JUST AS SYRIAN NAVAL BLOCKADES HAVE SOUGHT TO DENY THEM ARMS. FROM OUR VANTAGE POINT, SYRIA HAS IN RECENT WEEKS BEEN ACTING TO TIGHTEN ITS CONTROL OF THE LEBANESE HINTERLAND, WHILE IN THE CAPITAL ALLOWING THE ARAB LEAGUE AMPLE SCOPE TO

DEMONSTRATE ITS INEFFECTIVENESS AND SANCTIONING RIGHTIST MILITARY ACTIONS AGAINST THE CAMPS. WHEN IT CAN DO SO WITHOUT RISKING DRAMATIC ISOLATION IN THE ARAB WORLD, SYRIA, PREDICTABLY, WILL TIGHTEN THE NOOSE FURTHER ON THE AREAS OF PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST CONTROL.

6. SO FAR SYRIA HAS BEEN HIGHLY RESPONSIVE TO OUR REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE TO EMBASSY BEIRUT AND AUH. WE HAVE HAD OUTSTANDING COOPERATION FROM SYRIAN TECHNICAL MINISTRIES IN FACILITATING THE TRANSIT OF SUPPLIES TO AND FROM BOTH EMBASSY BEIRUT AND AUH.

7. I PRESUME WE ARE NOT UNHAPPY WITH THE SYRIAN GOAL OF RESHAPING THE PLO AND DEFLATING PALESTINIAN EXPECTATIONS GENERALLY. IF THAT IS TRUE, THEN THE QUESTION ARISES ON WHAT GROUNDS WE SHOULD SEEM TO QUESTION THE SYRIAN TACTIC OF APPLYING THEIR POLITICAL/MILITARY SQUEEZE IN THE WAY THEY CONSIDER MOST EFFECTIVE. FURTHERMORE, SYRIANS ARE ACCUSTOMED, WITH REGARD TO ANY U.S. ACTION OR DEMARCHE, TO LOOK FOR HIDDEN PURPOSES BEHIND SURFACE DISCUSSIONS. THEY COULD WELL READ INTO OUR PLEA FOR THE SAFETY OF AMERICAN CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS IN WEST BEIRUT A BROADER U.S. DESIRE NOT TO SEE FATAH/PLO STRENGTH IN LEBANON BROKEN. WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO PUT OURSELVES IN THIS POSITION.

8. HAVING SAID THIS, I FULLY SHARE AMBASSADOR SEEYLE'S CONCERNS REGARDING THE PROSPECT OF EMBASSY BEIRUT'S FALLING HOSTAGE TO THE PLO AS WELL AS THE FUTURE OF BOTH AUB AND AUH IN SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES. I WOULD, OF COURSE, BE WILLING TO DISCUSS THESE SUBJECTS WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR DAOUDI OR COS SHIHABI (WHEN AND IF I CAN SEE HIM) SO THAT SARG WILL BE AWARE OF OUR CONCERNS. BUT I FRANKLY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT RAISING THE MATTER WITH THEM WILL
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HAVE ANY PRACTICAL EFFECT, EITHER AS A DETERRENT TO POSSIBLE SYRIAN ACTION OR AS PLEA FOR SAVING "BENEFICIAL FOREIGN INSTITUTIONS ON LEBANESE SOIL. FINALLY, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THE SYRIAN BAATH NATIONALIZED SUCH INSTITUTIONS IN SYRIA IN THE MID-SIXTIES AND THERE ARE IDEOLOGUES IN THIS RULING PARTY WHO WOULD BE JUST AS HAPPY TO SEE AMERICAN LINKS BROKEN WITH BOTH AUB AND AUH.

9. ISUGGEST DEPARTMENT PASS TO AMMAN, BEIRUT AND JIDDA.
MURPHY

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